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### PRESS RELEASE

#### GRANT DETERMINING VALUE OF ECOSYSTEM SERVICES TO SUPPORT SMART LAND USE DECISIONS IN NARRAGANSETT BAY WATERSHED

LINCOLN, MA – Mass Audubon, the University of Rhode Island’s Coastal Resources Center, and the Natural Capital Project recently received a \$560,636 grant from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to develop information on the human benefits provided by the Narragansett Bay watershed. This three-year project will determine the economic value of these “ecosystem services” received from conserved land and clean water.

Narragansett Bay is home to several working ports and harbors and supports economic activities such as tourism, transportation, recreation, and commercial and recreational fishing and shellfishing. The Bay and its watershed also provides ecosystem services including control of nutrients and other water pollutants, climate regulation, protection from floods and droughts, and healthy animal and plant populations. Sixty percent of the Bay’s 1,600 square mile watershed is located in Massachusetts - an important consideration as the health of the bay is linked to activities throughout the watershed. A central challenge for the region in this century is to sustain a vibrant economy while protecting the environment as a key to quality of life for residents and visitors.

The project will help us better understand and address these challenges as well as incorporate the information into decision-making at local and state levels in both Massachusetts and Rhode Island. After developing models and scenarios to determine the market and nonmarket values of such benefits, the project partners will share the results at major conferences and regional meetings. Their findings will be integrated into decision-making processes to support smart land use.

As project partner Emi Uchida of the University of Rhode Island's Department of Environmental and Natural Resource Economics said, "The Narragansett Bay Watershed provides a wide range of benefits important to the economy and quality of life. Many policy and market decisions in our economy often involve difficult tradeoffs across space and future generations. Our goal is to empower the decision makers and the public to make better decisions by taking into account of essential benefits from the watershed."

Mass Audubon's [\*Shaping the Future of Your Community\*](#) program will coordinate with stakeholders to identify key challenges that decision-makers face and help communities better balance and target conservation and development. "We are excited about this opportunity to enhance understanding of the values natural lands provide and incorporate that into local and regional land use planning," said Heidi Ricci, Senior Policy Analyst at Mass Audubon.

The [Natural Capital Project](#) is a partnership between Stanford University, the University of Minnesota, World Wildlife Fund, and The Nature Conservancy. The group specializes in providing actionable science on the social benefits of nature, co-developed in consultation with stakeholders and decision makers. The project lead for Stanford, Dr. Robert Griffin, is a URI graduate and Rhode Island resident who currently oversees multiple projects for the Natural Capital Project throughout New England.

This project is funded through EPA's [Southeast New England Program](#) (SNEP). The [Narragansett Bay Estuary Program](#) is part of SNEP. Since its launch in 2014, SNEP's mission has been to seek and adopt transformative environmental management. Grantees have developed projects that share innovative solutions and foster collaborative problem-solving and new approaches. One of the goals of the Southern New England Program is to make connections across projects to ensure that restoration strategies are comprehensive and sustainable, that they are informed by input from key stakeholders, and that they are connected to the economies and enhance the ecosystem services that support coastal watershed communities.

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